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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COPENHAGEN 000173

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: Change of Danish PM: Implications for COP-15

Ref: A) Copenhagen 168

B) 08 Copenhagen 601

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**¶11.** (SBU) Summary: The recent change of Danish Prime Minister is unlikely to significantly shift the Danish approach to hosting UNFCCC climate talks at COP-15 in December in Copenhagen. Climate policy here enjoys strong political consensus, and the government of Lars Lokke Rasmussen will likely continue to pursue an ambitious climate agreement at COP-15 in its own political interest. However, the departure of Anders Fogh Rasmussen for NATO may diminish Denmark's international stature in the short term, and could change the internal dynamics of its climate change team in the run-up to COP-15. The effects could include boosting Climate and Energy Minister Connie Hedegaard's control over Denmark's negotiating strategy, and could motivate Lars Lokke to seek opportunities to boost his international credentials in advance of COP-15 by attending climate meetings involving heads of government. To safeguard U.S. interests, we should engage fully with Hedegaard and consider opportunities to help Denmark prepare for its role as COP-15 host. End Summary.

COP-15 Still a Prize

**¶12.** (SBU) Presiding over success at COP-15 remains a compelling political prize in host nation Denmark. The recent change of Prime Minister here does not signify a change of government; the same political coalition continues in power and is not required (or likely) to seek to renew its popular mandate before COP-15 (see Ref A).

**¶13.** (SBU) Strong political consensus already exists here in favor of a more comprehensive global approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions globally. The previous government was initially skeptical of global warming and only last year rebranded itself as "green," with Fogh Rasmussen touting his government's leadership in favor of an ambitious agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol when it expires in 2012. The opposition has been critical of Fogh Rasmussen for endangering the outcome at COP-15 by decamping for NATO, and has characterized Lokke Rasmussen's green credentials as suspect. In retort, prior to assuming the prime ministership, Lars Lokke publicly insisted he would be "no less ambitious" than Anders Fogh at COP-15.

Effects of Change on Climate

**¶4.** (SBU) Government, media and industry sources here worry the change in Danish leadership could slow momentum in international climate negotiations, since Lokke Rasmussen lacks the international stature of his predecessor. Some further speculate it will permit activist Climate and Energy Minister Connie Hedegaard to consolidate her influence over government policy regarding international climate negotiations. Her ministry, specially created for her after the elections of 2007, works closely on COP-15 issues with an interagency committee headed by the Prime Minister (Ref B). With early pressure on the new PM to prove his leadership on domestic economic issues, observers expect him to leave the details of protracted climate negotiations to Hedegaard, who has emerged as an active and popular minister. Some speculate here that if COP-15 is deemed a political success, Hedegaard could be rewarded with the Foreign Ministry.

**¶5.** (SBU) We have noted recent signs of tension between Hedegaard (who hails from the Conservative Party, the junior partner in the governing coalition) and the PM's Office (both Rasmussens represent the Liberal Party) over who should attend the upcoming Major Economies Forum preparatory meeting in Washington. Staff close to Hedegaard told us she would be the logical choice, but Anders Fogh chose instead to send his climate advisor, Bo Lidegaard. It seems likely Lars Lokke will stick with Lidegaard, but Hedegaard may add her own people to the delegation.

#### Building Credibility

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**¶6.** (SBU) The new PM shares with his predecessor (and Hedegaard) a keen political interest in Denmark presiding over a successful COP-15 event resulting in agreement on a post-Kyoto regime to deal with climate change. It seems likely that Lars Lokke, who has little foreign policy experience, will seek opportunities to boost

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his credentials by appearing at selected events on the world stage. Most prominent among those events, in our view, would be climate-focused gatherings of heads of government including the G8-Major Economies Forum (MEF) in La Maddalena in July, and at UN climate events in New York in September. These events combine high exposure with short duration.

#### Comment

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**¶7.** (SBU) While Danish climate policy is unlikely to shift significantly, the change in Denmark's leadership could still adversely affect U.S. interests if the new PM proves an ineffective COP-15 host. In the run-up to COP-15 we can safeguard interests by working closely with Hedegaard and her team, and help Lars Lokke Rasmussen prepare for his host role by inviting him to share the stage at climate meetings involving key heads of government.

McCulley